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Obama's 'First To Know' Weren't

By John Dunbar The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Barack Obama's pledge to supporters that they would be the "first to know" his running mate turned out to be a savvy but unworkable communications strategy.

The Democratic presidential candidate got scooped by the media on his own announcement, done in by dogged reporting, looselipped party insiders and the limits of technology.

But all was not lost. He amassed a huge database of cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses for the fall campaign.

Obama's plan to use text messaging to announce his choice was a first in politics. He had promised supporters that by providing cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses they would be "part of this important moment" — the revelation of his choice for vice president.

The text message announcing Sen. Joe Biden as Obama's pick began filtering across the U.S. at 3:02 a.m. EDT Saturday, when most people were asleep. By then, it was old news, by today's standards. The media had reported the pick more than two hours earlier.

The campaign won't say how many people signed up to receive the text message, nor will the small Washington, D.C., company that handled the imposing chore.

"It's a big number," said Kevin Bertram, the 37-year-old founder and CEO of Distributive Networks.

The 16-employee firm, which built the text messaging system, has higher-paying clients. According to Federal Election Commission records, it has received about \$130,000 from the Obama campaign, not including August.

Bertram said it took about 15 minutes for the bulk of the messages to get through the system. Meanwhile, the campaign posted the veep choice on its Web site.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS This is the text message the Obama campaign sent around 3 a.m. EDT Saturday announcing his veep pick.